the activist

Spring 2020

The Activist **is a publication by and for volunteer organizers in the Young Democratic Socialists of America, edited by members of YDSA's National Political Education Committee, and featuring the writing of YDSA activists from chapters across the country. Early editors and contributors included *Jacobin* contributor and NPC member Chris Maisano, *Jacobin* founder and editor Bhaskar Sunkara, and former DSA Deputy Director David Duhalde.**

The original *Activist* ran its last issue in Fall 2017, but the 2019 summer convention passed a resolution to revive the publication, based on the idea that "there exists within YDSA an acute need for a unifying, engaging, and thoughtful publication of the socialist youth perspective, particularly from the most marginalized youth in the United States; for political dialogue and theoretical development within YDSA on topics including organizational culture, tactics, and strategy, which is guided by the real experiences of organizers on the ground; and for a means to develop a shared community and camaraderie by promoting and institutionalizing respectful and rigorous political debate as an integral function of YDSA."

The Activist
Spring 2020

A Publication of the Young Democratic Socialists of America
National Political Education Committee
y.dsausa.org/the-activist

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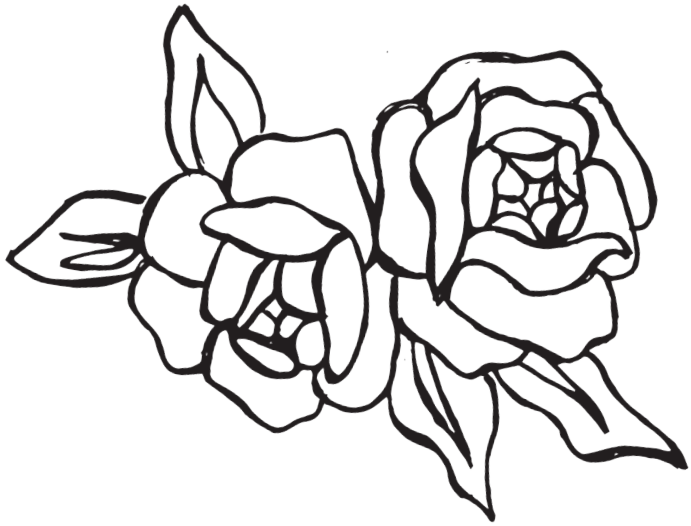

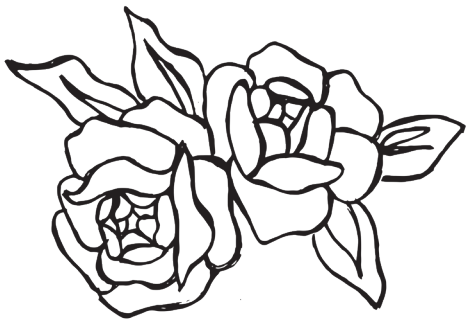

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Letter from the Editors

YDSA's membership has skyrocketed since the Bernie bump in 2016, and with now nearly 100 chapters across the country, the organization has a wealth of members with a variety of experiences, perspectives, and skills. The goal of *The Activist* is to bring those perspectives together, to heighten the level of political conversation in YDSA, and to encourage comradely discussion and debate between organizers across the country.

To those ends, *The Activist* has started publishing a variety of articles — from political, theoretical, and strategic arguments, to reflections on work chapters have done — at y.dsausa.org/the-activist. We're also planning a series of writing workshops and political discussions, and are hoping to publish more and more great work from YDSA members around the country that will not only shape the political and strategic conversations the organization faces, but also help give voice to a thriving youth socialist culture. We want everyone in YDSA to feel empowered to write articles, share visual art or creative writing, or send us ideas about what we should do next. If you want to submit something, share an idea, or get involved with editing, publishing, and promoting *The Activist,* we'd love to hear from you! You can find out more about the submission process at y.dsausa.org/the-activist, and you can always feel free to send us an email with your ideas, thoughts, questions, and concerns. Even — no, especially — if you disagree with us.

At the end of the day, *The Activist* aims to be a space where YDSA members can come together to deepen our camaraderie, refine our strategy, and build the future of the largest student socialist organization in the country. We have a lot to learn from each other, and we have a world to win.

We've got some big plans, but we — *The Activist* Editorial Board, that is — can't do this alone.

YDSA is your organization, and *The Activist* is yours too.

The Activist Editorial Board is a subcommittee of the YDSA National Political Education Committee, composed of volunteers from YDSA chapters across the country.

It currently includes:

Halsey Hazzard *(NYU),* Executive Editor
Nate Stewart *(UMBC)*, Media Editor
Jack Zhang *(Phillips Exeter Academy)*
Jatnna De la Cruz *(CUNY City College)*
Griffin Mahon *(UVa)*, Managing Editor
Elias Khoury *(UMich)*, Newsletter Editor
Nate Knauf *(Georgia Tech)*, Digital Editor

A Report from the YDSA National Coordinating Committee

2019 was an incredible year for YDSA! With 91 chapters and 95 organizing commitees, students are actively changing the narrative about socialism on campuses and in communities across the country.

Over the last year, YDSA had many achievements in our fight for socialism. Whether it was fighting against racism, sexism, xenophobia and more on campus or leading the fight for critical left policies like Medicare for All, College for All, and a Green New Deal, our YDSA chapters ran many campaigns on their local campuses that have translated into a massive national movement of young people fighting for a socialist future.

Since the 2019 YDSA Convention, the new YDSA NCC has been hard at work fulfilling the mandates of our members. As the NCC we have worked hard to create and maintain an array of new committees that our members decided were necessary due to the urgency for active organizing to address issues like the climate crisis, to create a mass organization, and fight for a political revolution. These committees have been hard at work at creating a national infrastructure to help local chapters in any and all ways possible.

Along with forming these committees, the NCC also took action on a very popular demand from our membership to enhance our political education program. To accomplish this, the NCC has successfully established a Political Education Committee. The individuals who have been working on this have already created multiple lesson plans for local chapters to teach their members about what democratic socialism truly means. Along with the implementation of this committee, the NCC also re-established an editorial board for *The Activist*. The hard work and success of the members working on this important project is the exact reason you are reading this story today!

We as an NCC want to thank each and every member for all their hard work in building our movement and wish you all good luck in your local fights for justice. Unite! Fight! Win!

In Solidarity,
The YDSA NCC

The YDSA NCC

Kristen Cervero, *NYU YDSA*
Amelia Blair Smith, *Carleton College YDSA*
Morganne Blais McPherson, *UC Davis YDSA*
Remington Mickle, *Purdue YDSA*
Austin Cable, *UTSA YDSA*
Tarig Robinson, *Temple YDSA*

Austin Cable is an At-Large Member on the YDSA NCC and chair of his local chapter at East Tennessee State University. He has spent the majority of his collegiate career organizing students and workers in his community to turn the South a different shade of red!

Why YDSA?

Throughout highschool I thought I was politically engaged. Despite attending an elite private highschool, I attempted to engage with social justice work there, but those attempts largely amounted to hollow liberal self-struggle and educating the children of the elite about the importance of social justice. It wasn't until I joined NYU YDSA and NYC DSA that I began to understand what engaging in real politics meant. It was through the active process of collective political education and struggle — organizing around universal rent control, Medicare for All, working on NYC DSA's electoral campaigns — that I was turned from a progressive Berniecrat into a committed lifelong socialist organizer. This August, I began my first year at Yale and have since been working to help organize a YDSA chapter there. At first it might seem strange to organize in such an elite institution. But the immense inequality both on campus and between the university and New Haven and Connecticut's working-class communities is what demands socialist organization fighting back against these injustices and for a better world.

In the beginning of the semester, I met up with an organizer from Students Unite Now (SUN), an organization campaigning to abolish the Student Income Contribution, a significant share of tuition that students on financial aid have to pay. While we were talking, he asked me about my vision for the Yale YDSA chapter. He had been a member of the previous iteration of Yale YDSA, which had fizzled out and essentially didn't exist by the time I arrived on campus. Like other former members, he didn't view it as a productive use of his limited time: it had met once a month, consisted of small, unconnected working groups of a few members each, and had no major campaign of its own, instead acting as a mobilizing body to support other campus activist work. He asked what would there be in this new iteration of YDSA for him — why YDSA? His question has stuck with me all semester as I've worked to build Yale YDSA into a fighting organization.

To answer the question Why YDSA?, we have to start by outlining our vision for how we might achieve the world we want to see, which, in the case of socialists, is the overthrow of capitalism. What comes closest to my own vision is outlined by Eric Blanc as the "Marxist case for democratic socialism" in his debate with Charlie Post at the Socialism in Our Time conference last year.

Blanc proposes that winning socialism in an advanced capitalist democracy like the United States will require a "universal suffrage election of a workers' party to government." When the party begins to implement its democratic mandate, "the ruling-class minority" will "resort to antidemocratic sabotage of the elected government." A mass socialist workers' party would be tasked with "[d]efeating this reaction—through the power of mass action as well as the actions of our elected representatives—[which] would culminate in a complete break with capitalist control over the economy and the state." This party would derive its power from its roots in the organized working class, in the form of militant and democratic unions willing to engage in strikes and mass actions to defend the revolutionary program, seize the means of production, and bring about the transition to socialism.

Given that we currently have neither the mass socialist workers' party nor the militant and democratic unions that are required for the overthrow of capitalism, the central tasks ahead for organized socialists must be guided by a strategy specifically geared toward building said party and reuniting the left with the organized working class. National campaigns like YDSA for Bernie, College for All, a Green New Deal, and Campus Labor Organizing allow us to connect different local issues to larger unified struggles, bringing together campaigns on campuses around the country in service of a larger movement. By connecting these demands to a broader socialist program, we are able to build the structures and membership for a future party.

Party-building not only entails the local articulation of common campaigns and struggles, but the active coordination of independent socialist electoral politics, an arena that Rosa Luxemburg described as "one of the most powerful and indispensable means of carrying on the class struggle." This isn't to say we can simply elect our way into socialism, but that the electoral realm is a necessary venue for class struggle — especially since most people's sole engagement with politics is through elections. Class-struggle electoral campaigns and socialist electeds can use their platforms and offices to organize workers and communities, and to heighten conflict against the politicians and capitalists standing in the way of reforms. These types of campaigns must be actively antagonistic toward the Democratic Party, and must also bring people into non-electoral campaigns as part of a broader socialist vision.

This fusion between electoral and non-electoral work demands an independent socialist organization to bring the two together with explicit socialist consciousness. Currently, most students supporting Bernie Sanders are not part of an organization that engages in non-electoral socialist organizing. Canvassing for Bernie with YDSA allows us to talk to our classmates and community members not only about Bernie's radical platform, but also the obstacles that passing it will entail and how only collective power and organization can overcome them.

To eventually break from the Democratic party and ballot line, however, requires something else: militant, democratic and socialist unions that will help carry out this break and provide the base of and power behind this new party. Most major unions in the US are currently governed undemocratically. They stifle rank-and-file militancy, don't organize

their members, and (rather than invest in organizing new shops) spend their resources lobbying and electing Democrats. To truly reinvigorate the labor movement, imbue it with a socialist consciousness, break from the Democratic party, and eventually win socialism, we need a concerted effort to make new socialists with a lifelong commitment to building both left organization and organic militant leadership on the shop floor. We have seen the beginning of the former through recent growth of DSA and YDSA, and the latter through rank-and-file caucuses formed by socialists, such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union, as well as many of the recent teachers' actions and strikes in which militants built power on the shop floor. In some cases DSA chapters played outsized organizing and support roles, and during the Chicago teachers' strike, New York City YDSAers flew to Chicago to do strike support and wrote about it for *The Activist*. Other YDSAers around the country have worked alongside campus staff and graduate students in supporting their rank-and-file organizing, and YDSA's labor committee is hard at work connecting soon-to-be graduates to jobs where they, too, can become rank-and-file union activists.

Yalies at a recent Bernie Canvass

Often upon graduation, socialists, progressives, and others with a commitment to social justice are unsure how to realize their values in their careers. Many choose to pursue graduate school, enter the non-profit world, work on liberal political campaigns, or become lawyers hoping to fight injustice in the courtroom. While these decisions are driven by noble intentions, they reflect an individualized theory of change that capitalism conditions into people. This is especially true in elite institutions such as Yale and NYU that actively prepare students to enter into elite segments of society, and tell others that actually want to create change that they can only do so through working within non-profits and the Democratic Party, social entrepreneurship, or individual consumption choices.

As the youth and college wing of DSA, YDSA is uniquely positioned to train organizers that can avoid these individualized and ineffective pathways to social change upon graduation and instead enter rank-and-file union jobs in strategic industries to help bridge the gap between socialists and organized labor. After years of undergraduate organizing, young socialists will have the tools, education, and social and organizational support systems to begin organizing with their co-workers on the shop floor. Through organizing with YDSA, many YDSA graduate students are already organizing within their unions. Recent grads are opting to go into union jobs as Teamsters, teachers, school social workers, nurses, and carpenters, bringing the organizing skills and political vision they've learned with them into their unions. Others are taking positions as staffers for rank-and-file caucuses, or becoming union staffers who use their roles to elevate rank-and-file power.

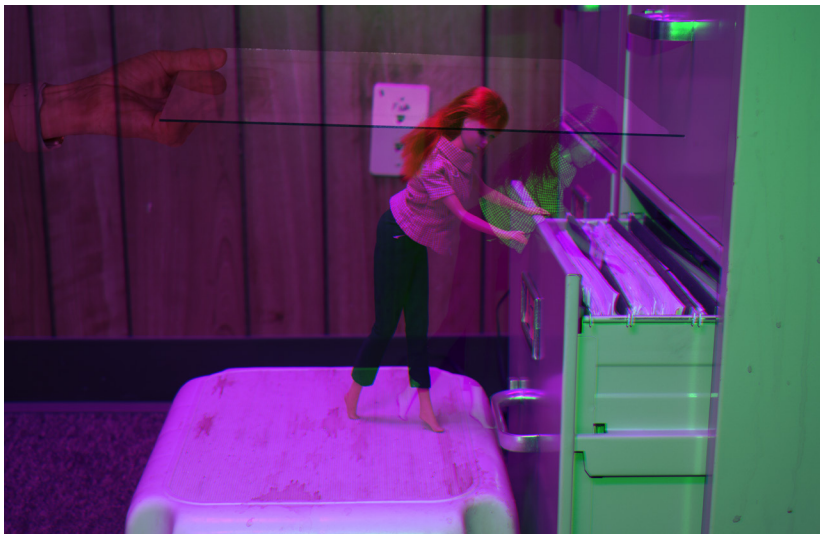
This is one reason why the political education provided by YDSA is so crucial. The role of political education in a nationwide socialist organization is more than to simply discuss socialist history and theory. Rather, it must prepare socialists to translate that history and theory into organizing in the current moment, and to engage students about what it means to be a lifelong socialist organizer. Campus activism often entirely focuses on issues that only concern students and fails to articulate how these campaigns build toward a larger movement. It's easy to be loud and angry about large-scale injustice for four years, but it's far harder to commit a lifetime to building toward socialism through deep organizing, which entails building deep relationships, making asks, and engaging workers and communities in strategic self-action around campaigns that respond to their own material interests. This is the type of deep organizing that Yale YDSA has been engaging in alongside Central Connecticut DSA in its nascent statewide Tax the Rich: Fund Public Education campaign, which hopes to use the issue of educational inequity in Connecticut to develop wider working-class organization that can fight back against educational austerity statewide. With Central CT DSA, we have done multiple educational equity canvasses in Waterbury, where the goal has been to get people to sign a petition and also to identify organic community leaders for follow-up meetings to bring them and their community connections into the struggle.

While Yale YDSA is still in its embryonic stage, we have already developed a core group of committed organizers as well as a broader base of those we have been able to mobilize to canvasses or meetings. Collective political education has aided in developing a common understanding of socialist strategy and what we're fighting for. This upcoming semester, we have plans to get more students off campus and into New Haven's working class communities to canvass for Bernie, grow Yale YDSA and Central CT DSA, and make new committed socialists who get there through the process of collective action, struggle, and education.

This is an incredible moment of growth for the US left, but it's important that we make the most of it and move forward with conviction and a clear strategy. With a globally rising violent far-right, skyrocketing inequality and impending climate doom on one hand and the possibility of a Bernie Sanders presidency and a resurgent labor movement on the other, it is more critical than ever to build YDSA and create a long-lasting left organization that can fight back and, one day, win socialism.

Oren Schweitzer is an undergraduate student at Yale University and an organizer with Yale YDSA and Central Connecticut DSA. Before that he was an organizer with NYU YDSA and NYC DSA.

“ALIENATION”
RAINN JACKSON



“In my series Alienation, I am considering Marx’s theory of alienation of the worker under capitalism. The Barbie doll stands in for the worker, representing the disposability of the worker to their boss or company.”

YDSA Demands College For All

College for All is YDSA's national campaign to cancel existing student debt, fight for tuition-free public higher education, end all forms of government subsidies to for-profit institutions, and to push for democratic representation of students, faculty, and staff in all higher education budgeting decisions. Chapters run local C4A campaigns around various local issues that usually relate to tuition in some way: expansion of wi-fi, setting student housing costs below market prices, expansion of student health services, etc. The goal is to formulate popular demands from the grievances of students and workers.

Socialists must fight for free higher education not just to combat the austerity, privatization, and gentrification that neoliberalism has brought to higher education, but also because colleges and universities are major sites that reproduce the logic and social relations of capitalism. We must take control of state and para-state institutions and test the extent to which they are relatively autonomous, figuring out how to use them for the benefit of the socialist movement. A key part of socialist governance within capitalist states is learning where rupture is possible. and how we can push for it in creating a social revolution towards socialism.

On the ground work

As an example of the fight for local demands, outlined below are the steps that UC Davis ran their "Wi-Fi to the people" College for All campaign. The way we help chapters create campaigns is generally based off of the basic campaign-building that UC-Davis utilized, especially in teaching members how to "cut an issue."

- Discussed readings on C4A at a Socialist Night School meeting on December 6, 2018.
- Voted on focusing on C4A within our campaign committee in mid-Dec 2018.
- Newly created campaign committee presented C4A to our general membership at a general membership meeting on January 9, 2019 where it was agreed to make C4A a priority within campaign work.
- Made a questionnaire on Jan 17. Members of the campaign committee spoke with general membership about the importance of the questionnaire, coordinated with the outreach committee to make sure that all tabling sessions would be using the questionnaire, and made an online version.
- The questionnaire started with open-ended questions and then focused on ranking broad issues (e.g. housing, policing, student debt). On January 31, 2019, members of the campaign committee met to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data from our in-person and online questionnaires, including an analysis of our university's informal meme page.

On February 1, possible issues were ranked from the collected data in terms of whether or not if they seemed achievable and could be put into a democratic socialist demand.

On February 1st, members of the campaign committee began to brainstorm ideas for a "sub"-campaign, and came up with 8 ideas from the results of Step 6. Each member voted on which idea 1) sparked the most joy, 2) was the most achievable, and 3) most built our organization.
These two ideas were then presented to general membership by the campaign committee for feedback. On February 6, the campaign committee presented the results of the research, the analysis, and the two big ideas we had. We then got feedback from the general membership members and held a vote. The "sub"-campaign that won: taking back student space.

We then investigated "who was in charge" of the decisions around our "sub"-campaign demands (our targets) and what the constraints to achieving these demands were. More questionnaires were also made to narrow down our demands. For example, the more easily achieved, material demands of the 'sub'-campaign were to have more outlets and better Wi-Fi. "Power (+Wi-Fi) to the people" demanded a) the installation of extension cords as a stop-gap measure, b) improved Wi-Fi coverage and c) democratic representation for students on proposed changes and additions to learning infrastructure.

On Feb 15 and Feb 22, we held two meetings to share this information. From there, the "sub"-campaign had begun to concretize. The information about problem spots, percentage of people without access to desired outlets, etc, would then help when we sent emails and set up meetings with targets of the campaign to discuss the issues, and when we eventually wrote a petition. A flyer with the campaign demands were created and printed so that they would be ready for a College for All launch party.

National demands and our current political moment

We are in a uniquely historic political moment: not only is there a viable socialist candidate for president, but he is also campaigning on two of DSA's national demands — a cancellation of all student debt and tuition-free higher education. To reflect this opportunity, the national College for All committee is merging with the Bernie 2020 and Labor committees into a temporary supercommittee (to be reevaluated at either the summer convention or when Bernie's campaign ends). YDSA's work will therefore hopefully be in lock-step with the most significant series of events for socialists since the '70s. Our work must grasp — and make the most of — this remarkable juncture. This is a make-or-break opening for us, not because socialism is on the ballot, but because the Sanders movement is a referendum on class politics.

Ajmal Alami is the former co-chair of YDSA (2017-2019) and current co-chair of the southeast Regional Organizing Committee. He studies at Virginia Tech, and is a member of the College for All committee.

Committee Reports

NATIONAL GROWTH & DIVERSIFICATION COMMITTEE

In the summer convention of 2019 YDSA membership passed a resolution which focused on starting YDSA chapters at Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Shortly thereafter, NCC decided to expand the mission of this committee to include other under-represented schools, such as high schools, community colleges, public universities, and trade schools.

So far, the diversification committee has focused on creating an organizing handbook for student organizers of color. The committee worked alongside comrades from Howard University to collect data from about 25 different chapters through a survey. This survey asked organizers of color about their experiences at school and the challenges they've faced. Although this work is not as visible as other committees, the work of the diversification committee to actively recruit students of color is essential to unify the working class and build power.

Jatnna De La Cruz is a student of Political Science at the City College of New York. She organizes with her school's YDSA chapter as a member of the Organizing Committee. She's also part of the editorial board of The Activist.

NYC YDSA at Bernie's Brooklyn College Rally, March 13 2019

NYC YDSA Supports the Chicago Educators Strike

NATIONAL LABOR COMMITTEE

At the core of socialist philosophy is the reality that our society is split primarily into two classes: the owning class and the working class. We know that the liberation of all people from capitalist exploitation can only come through working-class struggle, so it is necessary for socialists to organize the working class effectively, and that means building a strong organic connection to working class organizations. Serious socialists must consider how to relate to, radicalize, and strengthen labor unions in this country and across the globe.

The YDSA Labor Committee came out of the convention with a mandate to commit to:
1. the rank-and-file strategy (RFS), which dictates that young socialists should train to enter the workplace in key sectors of the workforce like teaching, nursing, and logistics and transportation in order to help build militant, democratic traditions within unions;
2. organizing campus labor, by building resources and developing the skills to find employment on campus, connect with existing unions, and organize coworkers into new such unions.

In September, the National Labor Committee of YDSA began meeting, but our limited capacity soon forced the Committee to reorient our strategy and postpone several of the stated mandates, opting to focus on the growth and development of a labor perspective within YDSA. We created a Labor Census to determine the density of union members and other relevant statistics about the membership of our organization, and updated the YDSA Labor Guide to bring it in line with DSA's Democratic Socialist Labor Committee and the new history of the labor movement over the past two years. Currently, we are developing a training for the 2020 Winter Conference in Chicago, in order to familiarize newer YDSA members with the centrality of the working class, the operations of unions, and the specifics of student-worker solidarity. We hope that YDSA members, as future and current workers, will consider joining the YDSA National Labor Committee and help carry out our crucial work for the student-worker socialist movement.

Sumter Alton is a union member and YDSAer. At Georgia Institute of Technology, they have organized around a range of issues from mental health to fair pay, and have helped grow GT YDSA from a handful of members to a vibrant, growing chapter running educational programs, labor solidarity work, electoral canvasses, and community pressure campaigns. They are currently a chapter committee chair organizing around higher education justice for undocumented people, and the interim chair for YDSA's National Labor Committee.

Committee Reports

UMBC YDSA with Metro DC DSA at a protest against War With Iran

INTERNATIONALISM COMMITTEE

At the 2019 YDSA Convention, delegates voted to withdraw YDSA from the International Union of Socialist Youth and establish an exploratory Internationalism Committee in order to continue building meaningful relationships with the international left, such as those we've forged with Canada's Quebec Solidaire and the UK's Young Labour.

The committee also reflects our common rejection of US imperialism and hegemony. As young people, many of us have never really known a pre-9/11 world. The liberties working people have lost in our country's vain pursuit of empire and the blood of innocents killed should weigh heavily on all of us. Yet, with that weight must come an equal passion for liberation not only for ourselves but for the international working class as a whole.

The Internationalism Committee spent its first semester growing and planting the seeds of promising new projects such as anti-imperialist political education material and fostering connections with organizers abroad. A few weeks ago, the Committee released its first official statement in response to the US's killing of Qasem Soleimani. We've also planned and prepared materials for a National Day of Action on March 20th, 2020 to commemorate the beginning of the Iraq War. This Day of Action will raise awareness about the US' continued military presence in Iraq, educate students about the atrocities committed during the war and call attention to the ROTC programs on college campuses that prepare students to carry out these acts of aggression abroad. In the coming months, The Committee will reach out to chapters and encourage them to participate by either staging a demonstration or hosting a teach-in about the US' crimes in Iraq.

NATIONAL POLITICAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Political education is an essential part of a socialist organization's internal and external activities. As students of socialism and class struggle, we look to historical and contemporary movements in order to effectively organize against the capitalist class, using these lessons to guide our practice in our current moment. As well, political education can expand the horizons of what we think is possible. For example, less than a century ago, U.S. cities experienced general strikes, and Communists built militant trade-unionism in the south.
If colleges and universities now are focused on training us to be better workers, and the liberal response is to say that learning is a good in-and-of itself, then the socialist response is that education is a tool for class struggle. We often think of education merely as a tool for the capitalist class, when in reality, it is essential to fomenting working-class resistance on campus and in broader capitalist society.

It is because of this crucial role of political education in a socialist organization that we, members of the YDSA National Political Education Committee, created a syllabus ("School of Socialism") and a manual. We hope you don't just learn new facts about people, events, and places, but also harness lessons of the past and present as weapons of and for the working-class. We would love to hear your experiences using these resources as well as your ideas for possible topics and readings. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us at theactivistydsa@gmail.com.

Morganne BM (UC Davis)
Jake Wartel (UVa)
Remi Mickle (Purdue)

UC Davis Night School

Lessons in Liberalism

As the Spring 2020 semester begins, Georgia Tech's YDSA chapter is about a hundred members strong, with multiple active committees and campaigns. There's a strong case to be made that we are the vanguard of the GT student movement. But before us, GT had been a complacent, apolitical campus — until Trump's 2016 election victory sparked an explosion of left-wing student organizing. Still, it took years for the nascent student movement to develop into a real political force on campus. Based on my years of organizing at GT, I believe the primary factors in this long development were the inexperience of our student organizers, the early fear of the "S" word among us, the lack of leftist organizations to support our emerging movement, and the misdirection of student energy into reactionary liberal institutions. Eventually we found our way to YDSA, which provided us with critical organizing skills, infrastructure for mass democracy, and a class conscious political vision. But at first, the GT student movement was stuck stumbling in the dark.

On February 2nd, 2017, I found myself, essentially by chance, organizing a spontaneous "Student Solidarity Rally" against Trump's Muslim ban. Since no leftist or activist organizations existed at the time, the rally fell to an ad-hoc group of graduate and undergraduate students with mostly no organizing experience, who turned out nearly 1000 people. We got around 250 email signups, and it looked like the beginning of an anti-Trump student movement. But after the ban was temporarily halted, the main graduate student organizers decided to call it quits. Knowing that we needed a lasting organization, not spontaneous mobilization, a few others and I decided to keep organizing.

I had initially tried to join the College Democrats, which was extremely difficult to even find and sign up for. But after joining, it became immediately obvious that the club was powerless and ineffective. Those of us who had been energized by the rally correctly decided to organize outside of the Democratic Party.

I met two students who were DSA members, and we attended the Metro Atlanta DSA's February 2017 meeting where we discussed starting a YDSA chapter. Shortly after, we held an organizing meeting of about a dozen students on campus. Despite our support for YDSA, the progressive liberals in the meeting pushed back on the use of the "S" word because of its supposed baggage. They insisted that we form a big-tent "progressive" organization with a political line so vague it was barely political. YDSA's mission statement was plagiarized, the term "democratic socialism" was struck, and the Georgia Tech Progressive Student Alliance (PSA) was founded.

PSA went on to launch some highly visible campaigns throughout 2017, but the organization was plagued by ambiguity and structurelessness. When it came to organizing, PSA opted to reinvent the wheel rather than learn from socialists who had been doing it for decades. PSA was highly undemocratic, with an unelected self-selected "core" leadership, and members divided into highly siloed working-groups called "pods." I and two others, a majority of the original core membership, were actually pushed out of leadership by a two-person minority, who declared themselves co-chairs. Our monthly general meetings (with an attendance of 15-30) did facilitate discussion, but never had a democratic framework for members to propose or debate a course of action. We had no bylaws or constitution, and I don't recall ever holding a membership vote.

Most importantly, PSA lacked a class analysis of our campus. We developed a liberal theory of change, which focused on swaying administrators, legislators, and donors. While PSA had some successes, we had difficulty building power because we prioritized visibility and the appearance of activism (with rallies and marches, lobby days, and media publicity) over meaningful organization-building and membership development. Without a socialist understanding of the world, without viewing the working class as the primary agent of change for political revolution, our campaigns were ineffective. PSA's final campaign came in September 2017, when PSA & YDSA member, anarchist, and queer activist Scout Schultz was murdered by campus police, sparking a new wave of student agitation. I will primarily discuss PSA's role in an ensuing reform campaign, but I am including footnotes with additional coverage of these events.

Just a few days after the shooting, we called an emergency mass meeting where we decided to launch a publicity campaign for campus reforms around three planks: LGBTQIA+ rights, mental health resources, and policing reform. Our members went on to plaster our demands all across campus, and PSA released a widely-covered statement that threatened a "die-in" in the university president's office. Unfortunately, PSA was not organized or disciplined enough to follow through, and reactionary forces used tactics against us that I later learned were universal in student organizing. A vigil for Scout that PSA and GT Pride Alliance organized was co-opted by administrators with a damage-control agenda, who involved themselves in planning and pressured student organizers to bar some of Scouts' friends from speaking to prevent any blame from being directed at the administration. PSA's demands were adopted into an initiative of the president, Path Forward, and student energy was misdirected into powerless show committees that spent a year developing meager policy recommendations and waiting out student energy. Our bureaucratic student government was manipulated by administrators into re-allocating $500,000 of student fee dollars away from student clubs and towards conciliatory mental health initiatives (like swing sets and "nap pods") in a literal austerity scheme.

In response to this resistance, PSA put out a statement thanking the university for the creation of the action teams,

retracted the “die-in” threat, and began talking with administrators and anointed “student leaders.” GT has a class of student bureaucrats or “administration collaborators.” They are leaders in student organizations, often stipended, who are cultivated by GT’s student life programs to play a conciliatory role between university staff and the student-worker class and manufacture student consent for campus capitalism. Some of PSA’s leaders were soon convinced that they weren’t utilizing the “proper channels” for social change, and that they had to defer to the leadership of student bureaucrats, for example those in our student government, or the so-called Mental Health Student Coalition.

A conflict around strategy developed between PSA’s conciliatory leadership and more militant membership. The dissenting membership was mostly comprised of a group of radical queer activists, who were organizing to defend people arrested at a protest after the PSA-organized vigil. With no confidence from the membership, and dwindling activity both due to finals week and the complacency with the administration’s response, the co-chairs decided to resign in early December. The radical queer group, and others, continued to organize around the arrestees’ defense, however nobody stepped up to lead PSA, so the organization effectively collapsed. Some DSA members and I had already started organizing a YDSA chapter as a subgroup within PSA at the start of the fall semester, so by the time of this collapse, YDSA had grown to a decent size (about 10 people at biweekly meetings), with two committees and a functioning internal democracy. When classes resumed in January 2018, YDSA began recruiting PSA’s most active members, including the majority of the radical queer group. PSA never had another meeting, and in the spring, the remaining “leadership,” all YDSA members now, decided to officially merge PSA into YDSA.

Since then, YDSA has become the primary manifestation of the student movement at Georgia Tech. After a training with a DSA staff organizer in April, we were able to carry forward some of PSA’s reform demands with a petition campaign, and we ended up winning a large counseling center staff increase and reduced psychiatry fees in Fall 2018. Through mass-action campaigns, we’ve grown to about a hundred local-dues-paying members, with healthy committees meeting weekly and organizing independent campaigns around immigration, climate change, Bernie Sanders’ candidacy, and more. We’ve developed relationships with our local DSA chapter and have helped YDSAs start up at nearby campuses. And, most importantly, we’ve connected our local community to a nationwide struggle for the liberation of the working class, and we’ve learned from comrades across the country, just as you, dear reader, are hopefully doing now.

PSA was at its best when it harnessed the energy of an agitated, militant membership, but without a class-conscious socialist strategy, the organization was easily beaten back and tricked into effective self-destruction by capitalist forces. As the year-long history of GT PSA shows, our initial decision to form an amorphous local “progressive” organization instead of a YDSA chapter was a mistake, and it’s one I hope new student organizers avoid. Affiliating with YDSA was critical to developing our nascent student movement into an organized political force. Another wave of student agitation is sure to follow Bernie Sanders’ democratic socialist campaign for President, and, win or lose, there will soon be socialist students across the country itching to get organized. So, my message to all student organizers is this: Unite with YDSA under a clear mission and strategy! Fight back against the parasitic capitalist class! Win democratic socialism for the many, not the few!

Footnotes / See Also:
“The Trigger Effect” by Hallie Lieberman in the Atavist Magazine
https://magazine.atavist.com/the-trigger-effect-scout-schultz-georgia-tech
“Scout Set That Fire,” student-made documentary film
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiT1g682WNU

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HYPERPOLARNATION
By Alexis Valeriano

Do not forget
that when we live
we have regrets.
If we forgive,
we can’t forget
the shrunken width
of a heart oppressed.
Don’t buy the myth
that we’re different.
The love we give
will never end.

Ecosocialism Now: YDSA and the Green New Deal

For young people, the struggle against climate change is both existential and anti-capitalist. Liberal environmental groups have grown tremendously by seizing on the former, pointing to the first-world (and first-world adjacent) climate catastrophes in Australia, California, and Puerto Rico, but we, as socialists, answer the looming question of "what next?" by recognizing the root cause of environmental degradation: capitalist production. At the national level and in chapters across the country, YDSA is fighting to simultaneously eliminate capitalism and the ecological crisis it has created.

NYC Climate Strike, September 20th, 2019, by Adrian Mikulak (NYU YDSA)

The Youth Climate Strike on September 20th — attended by over four million people worldwide (many of them at over 1,000 events around the United States) — demonstrated the climate movement's potential strength, but individual organizations like Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion have failed to construct a lasting, mass movement. The Green New Deal, however, as spearheaded by DSA-endorsed presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders and DSA Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, provides a solid foundation on which to build a movement. As the largest student socialist organization in the United States, YDSA must be at the forefront of this movement, and organize the millions of students and young people galvanized by the current upswell of climate activism into a programmatic, militant, and revolutionary campaign.

At the 2019 YDSA National Convention, national delegates resolved to prioritize the Green New Deal and Bernie Sanders campaigns, continuing YDSA's efforts to support demands that benefit the working class, bringing them into a movement around these demands and the class-struggle candidates who advance them. Since then, chapters across the country have taken up the ecological fight in various ways, connecting it to the broad array of issues that socialists understand can only be addressed by confronting capitalism head-on.

In November, YDSA endorsed Sanders and AOC's Public Housing Green New Deal Act, the first step towards turning the ambitious but necessary goals of the Green New Deal into a reality. The bill explicitly connects climate change to racial injustice, centers the need for a just transition for workers, includes community control of public housing projects, and is based on the idea that not just housing, but safe, sustainable, and dignified housing, is a human right. By supporting this legislation and foregrounding climate change in our organizing for Sanders, YDSA chapters can draw these connections and bring people into a broader movement that both understands and combats the root of the problem.

Bernie Sanders' campaign is not the only place YDSA members can bring a socialist perspective to the climate movement. Many local, state, and congressional candidates have also taken up the Green New Deal, giving us the chance to publicly make the case for socialism as an antidote to fossil-fueled climate barbarism. Last year, NYU YDSA spent the summer canvassing for Julia Salazar, a DSA member who unseated an establishment Democrat and now represents North Brooklyn in the New York State Senate. Since her election, Salazar has worked with the NYC DSA electoral working group to spearhead efforts to have the New York Power Authority take over power generation for all New Yorkers and transition NYPA to renewables. While the success of this legislation is not yet certain, Salazar's campaign and office have continued to make climate change a priority in public discourse as well as legislation.

After Salazar's election, NYU YDSA shifted their focus to campaigning for Bernie Sanders on campus, foregrounding the Green New Deal in their messaging to fellow students and doubling their membership in the process. They hosted a panel on the Green New Deal that featured then-DSA Seattle City Council candidate Shaun Scott, as well as DSA members Dr. Nancy Romer and Dr. Matt Huber. Scott and Romer emphasized the importance of organizing in the workplace and using strikes to extract environmental concessions from the ruling class, and all the panelists drew connections between housing justice, labor rights, racial justice and the environment. Though Shaun Scott's city council run was unsuccessful, he and Chanan Suarez, who ran for Bellingham, WA City Council on a similar platform of housing justice and a municipal Green New Deal (and with lots of support from Western Washington University YDSA), have successfully pushed the conversation to the left.

The YDSA chapter California State University, East Bay (CSUEB), a heavily working-class commuter school, has amassed a mailing list with nearly 300 names since its founding in September by handing out copies of the Green New Deal resolution while tabling and speaking out at sustainability events. In addition to canvassing for Bernie and the Green New Deal, CSUEB YDSA held a housing week of action and a divestment campaign, and grew its presence on campus by organizing around issues like these that matter to students and in conjunction with housing justice groups like the Bay Area's ACCE Action. "Public Housing must be part of any successful Green New Deal implementation," says CSUEB YDSA member Michael Roe.

NYU, WWU, and CSUEB are just a few of the YDSA chapters engaged in this crucial work. Albany High School YDSA in the Bay Area just co-hosted a Climate Strike Forum, and Loyola YDSA members are working on GND and housing campaigns in conjunction with their Bernie work — and that's just scratching the surface. Across the United States, YDSA chapters are backing Bernie and other class struggle candidates at all levels of government, and fighting for sustainability, fossil fuel divestment, and climate justice on campus and beyond. YDSA's National Political Education Committee has created night school curricula on Bernie 2020 and the Green New Deal, and the national Green New Deal committee is encouraging chapters to hold debates and votes on taking up the GNDI as a priority campaign. Our movement is growing, and across the country thousands and thousands of students and young people are joining YDSA and taking up the fight a world where every single person is guaranteed a safe place to not only live, but thrive. Young people shouldn't have to lose sleep worrying about climate change and wondering if they have a future. If they find a home in YDSA, they can sleep soundly knowing they're part of an organization with a comprehensive political vision, and wake up ready to fight like hell to put it in action.

Halsey Hazzard is the editor-in-chief of The Activist and a member of YDSA's National Political Education Committee. She was on the Organizing Committee of NYU YDSA, and is now pursuing an MA in Labor Studies from the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies. Follow her @bigdsaenergy!

Bill Reisman is a member of YDSA's National Green New Deal Committee, the Organizing Committee of Bronx/ Upper Manhattan DSA, and is currently studying at CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies. Follow Bill @greennewbill!

WHITE BREATH TAKES UP TOO MUCH SPACE
by Alexis Valeriano

I cannot breathe.
The air is fine.
I cannot breathe.
It's in your mind.
I cannot breathe.
You will in time.
I cannot breathe.
Just count to nine.
I
can
not
breathe
Good, no more crime.

East Tennessee State University Adjunct Action Campaign

ETSU's Adjunct Action Rally, April 10, 2019

In the Fall of 2018, my fellow YDSA at East Tennessee State University co-chair Austin Cable and I met with members of the United Campus Workers – Communication Workers of America (UCW-CWA) union on our campus.We brought a proposal to our chapter to focus our efforts on a campaign to address adjunct professor compensation on our campus, a campaign that became the primary goal of our chapter for the remainder of the academic year.

The goal of the campaign is to raise adjunct wages, adjusted from their average of $600 per credit hour to $1000 per credit hour, to meet both the national average for pay and also to adjust for inflation since 1998. Adjuncts are capped at 9 credit hours per semester on our campus, meaning at full teaching capacity, they can make a maximum of $10,800 a year. These workers also have virtually no job security or benefits.

The campaign has so far consisted of five stages: 1) Planning and Prep 2) Student Government Action 3) Information Campaign and Groundwork 4) Rally and 5) Continued Pressure. From December through February, we planned within our chapter and in conjunction with the UCW to coordinate timelines, actions, and events. We called a meeting for all YDSA members, attendees, and the general Adjunct Action support base to do a petition packing event. During this event, we packed a manilla folder with an information preface, visual aid, and petition sheets and sent them to each faculty member in every department across campus. These packets included contact information for interested professors to allow us to come and give speeches and presentations to classes directly. This was a perfect example of grassroots organizing, volunteering, and campaigning. While this was happening, I authored a resolution in support of increasing adjunct compensation to be submitted to the Student Senate. Its near-unanimous passage signified to the Student Senate. Its near-unanimous passage signified official student body support, and made it possible for us to have a direct line to the President of the University through the Student Government. This resulted in a meeting with the President about the issue. We also connected with the Faculty Senate to court a joint resolution and to try to garner support amongst faculty for their adjunct co-workers. For our information campaign, we did media outreach, online petitioning, mass emails, campus tabling, stump speeches to classes and clubs, and campaign meetings. We were able to garner over 700 handwritten and 1700 online signatures for our Adjunct Action campaign petition. Multiple local newspapers have written op-ed and journal pieces in support of the campaign, and we also got coverage from all of the local media stations.

To finish off the year we held a public rally on campus, with financial and volunteer support from the UCW. The event, which featured speakers — including an adjunct, a tenured professor, a UCW member, and multiple YDSA members — drew 100 community members and inspired stories on all the local evening news programs. We chanted and gave out T-shirts, buttons, and refreshments, including a "21st birthday" cake demonstrating the 21 years adjuncts have gone without a raise. This rally allowed for us to connect our practical organizing and data based research to a public show of solidarity and moral advocacy. When the numbers don't work, the moral argument might.

In June of 2019, in response to a quickly scheduled and unpublicized Board of Trustees meeting where they were planning to increase tuition and fees once again, YDSA activists organized a protest that pointed to the vast unpopularity of the tuition hikes, especially when there were still no plans to address the abysmal compensation given to adjunct professors. We caught the attention of the media and confronted the President about these issues, a powerful assertion of discontent that was a necessary message for our administrators.

All of these efforts culminated in a directive from University Administration to increase adjunct contracts by $100 per credit hour. In some departments, this met the goal of $1000 per credit hour, but in others, it was only a first step. At the beginning of the Fall semester of 2019, I stood before our Board of Trustees, backed by our members, and reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to our original goals regardless of the positive progress that has been made.

In reflecting on this campaign, my hope is that you may find some practical takeaways from our experience, but I will say this: our campaign faced many obstacles, mostly from University administration, but also from certain Student Government leaders who were afraid of upsetting or losing favor

with administration officials. Originally, after the passage of our resolution in the Senate, we had planned to have our rally as a part of the officially sanctioned faculty appreciation week. Shortly before the event, the administrator who advises the Student Senate convinced the Student Government leaders to pull the event from official sponsorship. This caused a whirlwind of stressful replanning and fighting.

The high level of support and cooperation we built with faculty and staff by disseminating information and opening up our campaign to broad participation helped tremendously. We had many faculty members — adjunct and tenured — who were very willing to speak candidly at our rally about their experience, as well as advocate around campus. Convincing faculty is key, because their solidarity with their adjunct colleagues helps create the culture shift needed to demand change on our campus.

As we continue to press forward for the remainder of the 2019 – 2020 academic year, the stakes will only get higher: we're planning more Board of Trustees protests and an expansive walk-out/strike. This issue has become a very important one on our campus, and our goal is to keep receiving lots of public attention and continue to build our base of influence and organizing power. We hope that our grassroots organizing and mission-centric approach can help us achieve our goals of improving adjunct labor conditions, as well as build socialist inroads in the Appalachian south.

We will continue our fight and stand in solidarity with ETSU educators, because as the visionary Eugene V. Debs said, "while there is a lower class, I am in it."

Connor McClelland is the co-founder and vice-chair of the YDSA at East Tennessee State University, as well as the Adjunct Action campaign. He is currently acting as lead organizer of the YDSA at ETSU "Bucs for Bernie" primary campaign.

NOT ALL RADICALS WEAR CAPES
By Alexis Valeriano

From womb to life,
we live with death.
Behold of this sight.
Observe our rebirth.
I know we can rise
with one big breath
of fire to light
a path on this Earth.
We will organize
and show them our worth.

YDSA For Bernie: The Movement Behind the Moment

Young people all across the country are rising up to challenge the power of the capitalist class and promote a future that guarantees a high standard of living for every human being.

For the past 6 months, YDSA chapters all over the country have been fiercely campaigning for Bernie Sanders. By tabling, canvassing, phonebanking, hosting town halls, and registering voters, individual chapters are activating and mobilizing their schools and communities. This means persuading voters to not only vote for Bernie, but join the YDSA and build our mass movement. Chapters have also achieved these goals by participating in themed weeks of action around Bernie's plans for a Green New Deal, College for All, and national rent control. Talking to voters and handing out YDSA literature about Bernie's specific plans has helped chapters connect with voters on issues that affect them and recruit new volunteers to campaign with us. Through all this, chapters are learning the skills necessary to run effective and impactful campaigns. These skills will be critically important once Bernie is inaugurated, because we're still going to have to combat and overcome relentless attacks from the counter-revolutionary capitalist class in order to achieve Medicare for All, a living wage, a Green New Deal, and every last one of our demands.

Historically speaking, younger people have the lowest rates of voter turnout and for far too long our generation's demands have been sidelined. On a national level, YDSA chapters have registered thousands of new voters. Registering younger voters is essential to our overall strategy of increasing YDSA's organizing capacity and positively impacting Bernie's chances of winning. Such a simple ask can engage the youth with socialist policies and inflate our movement. Furthermore, a national YDSA for Bernie campaign means getting our organization's name and our socialist ideals out into mainstream political discourse. We achieved this during the 2016 election cycle in which the DSA and YDSA saw huge increases in membership. Now that chapters are actually campaigning for Bernie, we can promote more socialist policies and shift the Overton window of American political discourse to the left.
Every chapter is doing incredible work by getting voters to support Bernie, recruiting new people to YDSA, and building class consciousness. A few notable campaigns are those being done by chapters at NYU, UCLA, UAB, and ASU. These chapters are running effective campaigns by consistently hosting events and posting about their high attendance online in order to publicly demonstrate that democratic socialism is relevant, viable, and popular. UCLA YDSA has tabled for Bernie almost every week for the past few months. Their membership has grown and their capacity has greatly expanded to the point where they now host weekly door-to-door canvassing events. YDSA UAB tables weekly for Bernie and hosted a fantastic debate watch party in November, garnering about 30 viewers. NYU YDSA frequently hosts dorm storms where members knock on doors to speak to other students about Bernie. All these tactics are super effective in persuading voters to support Bernie and building our movement's capacity to organize for other socialist causes.

The YDSA for Bernie campaign is making unbelievable strides in the fight against capitalism and all forms of op pression. With every newly registered voter, our movement grows. With every door knocked, our movement grows. With every event, our movement grows. And when we all band together to back a unifying cause, we are unstoppable.

Caden Stearns is a member of YDSA's Bernie Coordinating Committee, was a member of the steering committee at YDSA at UC Santa Cruz, and is studying Politics at UCSC. Follow him @caden_stearns

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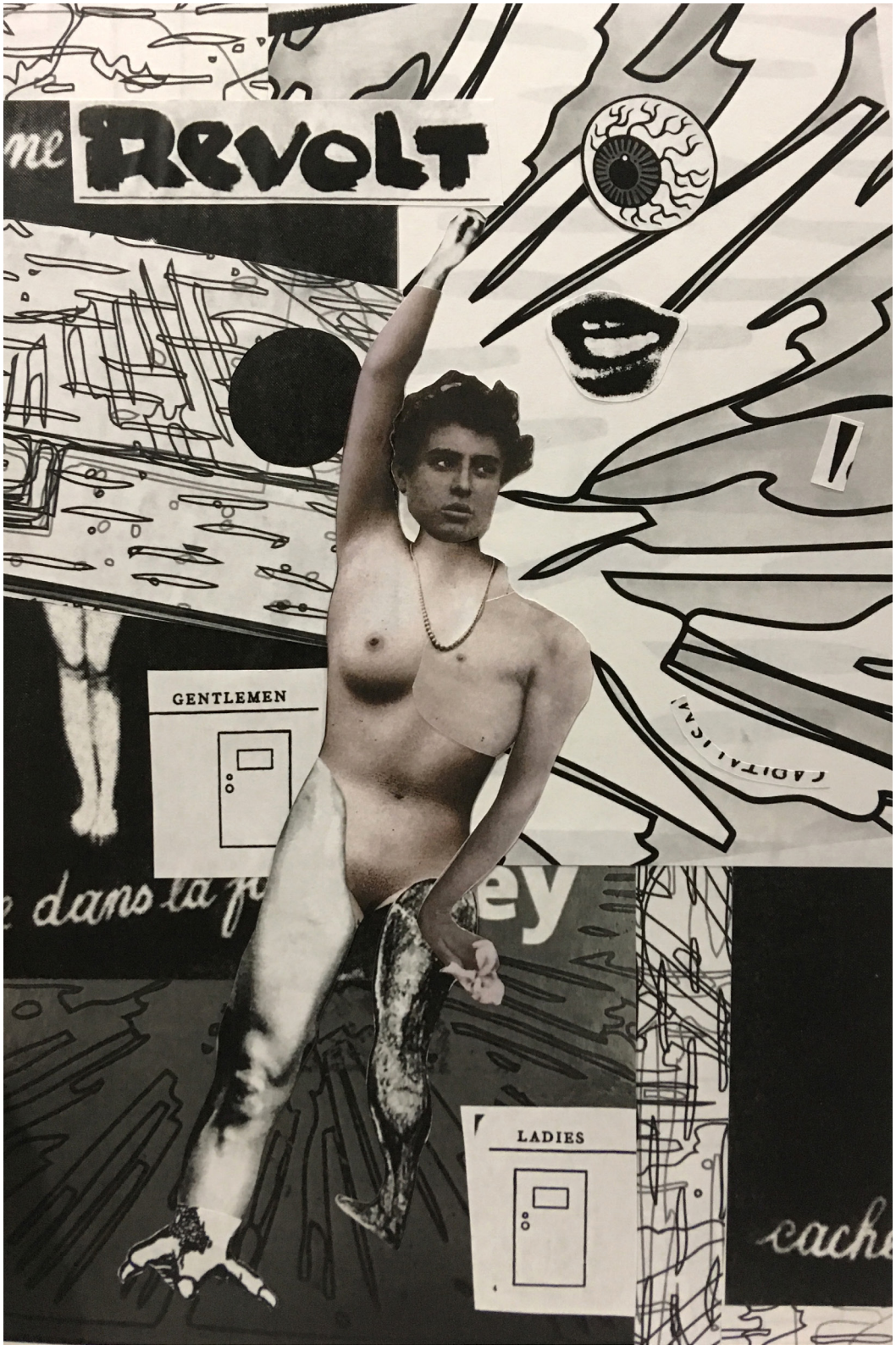

Above: Rainn Jackson
(University of Tennessee at Chattanooga)
You can find more of their work on Instagram
@rainn_jackson_media_art.

Front Cover: Nate Knauf (Georgia Tech)

Design by Julia Blend
(Virginia Commonwealth University)
You can find more of her work on Instagram
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“Intelligent discontent is the mainspring of civilization. Progress is born of agitation. It is agitation or stagnation.”

- Eugene V. Debs